

I look forward to seeing Vladimir Putin in 2 days. I've got a good relationship with Vladimir; I intend to keep it that way. But as well, I intend to remind him that if his interests lie West, that we share values, and that we—and those values are important. They're not only important for people that live within Russia; they're important to have good relations with the West.

France-U.S. Relations

Q. The first question to President Chirac. You have said, sir, yourself, that relations have always been excellent between France and the United States. We get the sense that in recent weeks they have become even better. They have become warmer and that there's a veritable new honeymoon, as it were, taking place.

And to you, President Bush, may I ask the following question: If, indeed, relations have improved, if certainly they are better between France and the United States, are they good enough as yet for that to warrant an invitation to President Chirac to go to the United States or even to your ranch? [*Laughter*]

President Bush. I'm looking for a good cowboy. [*Laughter*]

President Chirac. Let me say—repeat what I already said, namely, that our relations are indeed excellent. But they have been excellent for over 200 years now, because—why do I say that? Because they are based upon common values, common values that we share. And these things don't change overnight, with the wave of a wand.

Now, of course, that doesn't mean that because we share common values we don't—we necessarily agree on everything all the time. Of course, we can have our differences, our divergence of opinion. Recently, this was the case. We didn't share the same view over Iraq. But this in no way affects or in no way undermines the bedrock of our relations, namely, our common values and our common vision. And I repeat what I said earlier on, namely, that I feel it's so important that within the broader context of U.S.-EU relations, this relationship should continue to be cemented, broadened, and strengthened.

President Bush. This is my first dinner, since I've been reelected, on European soil,

and it's with Jacques Chirac, and that ought to say something. It ought to say how important this relationship is for me, personally, and how important this relationship is for my country.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:13 p.m. in the Ambassador's Residence at the U.S. Embassy. In his remarks, he referred to President Vladimir Putin of Russia. President Chirac referred to former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri of Lebanon, who was assassinated on February 14 in Beirut. President Chirac spoke in French, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom in Brussels

February 22, 2005

President Bush. I just had a good breakfast. I always enjoy being with my friend Tony Blair. We talked about the progress being made in Iraq, and I want to congratulate you on your vision. The Iraqis are—you know, have defied the terrorists and showed the world they want to live in a free society, and we're there to help them achieve that.

I'm looking forward to the NATO meeting today. NATO is a vital relationship for the United States and for Europe. And I'm looking forward to meeting with the EU as well. As I said in my speech yesterday, a strong Europe is very important for the United States, and I really meant that. And the Prime Minister is one of the strong leaders in Europe, and I really enjoy my relationship with him.

Prime Minister Blair. First of all, I'm pleased to come and talk to the President again and go through the range of different issues that we face in the world today. And I both welcome the President's speech yesterday very much and thanked him for it. And I think what it sets out is a very clear way forward for us now. Whatever the differences in the international community have been over the past couple of years, I think we have a really solid basis now for going forward in a unified way. And if we take that

opportunity, it will be greatly for the benefit of the international community.

We can see this, obviously, with Iraq, where after the democratic elections that are held now, it's possible to see a way forward in which Iraq can become a stable and a prosperous and a democratic state. And after all the tragedies of the past and the dictatorship and the loss of life under Saddam, there's now real prospect for the Iraqi people. And that, joined to what has happened in Afghanistan, I think gives us real hope for the future.

In addition, the President set out very clearly a way forward on the Middle East peace process. There's a renewed sense of vigor and optimism in that process. And with the London conference coming up next week, I think we've got every possibility now of trying to reach a settlement, which I think would do so much for international relations worldwide.

Then, of course, we also went through many of the other issues, to the upcoming G-8 later in the year and so on. So it was, as ever, a very constructive, very useful discussion across a whole range of issues. And as I say, I think that yesterday's speech and today's meeting at NATO gives us an opportunity to restate for people in Europe and in America the fundamental importance of this transatlantic alliance. It's been a cornerstone of our security for many, many years. It's based on shared values. It's absolutely the right thing for us to have at the center of our relations. And we'll do everything we can to make sure that that relationship is strong.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:42 a.m. at the Chief of Mission Residence at the U.S. Embassy. In his remarks, Prime Minister Blair referred to former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

The President's News Conference With Secretary General Jakob Gijbert "Jaap" de Hoop Scheffer of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

February 22, 2005

Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer.

Good afternoon. Very good afternoon to you. Let me start by—this press conference by echoing what was said many times around the table this morning, and that is, thanks to President Bush that he is here, showing the continued commitment to NATO so shortly after his Inauguration. I mean, I would be unfaithful to the discussion if I didn't start like this. So let me say once again on my own behalf, Mr. President, thank you for being here. Thank you for coming.

What did we discuss; what have I heard today? I have heard strong support for the Atlantic Alliance. I have heard strong support for the common values which bind us, in the past, in the present, and in the future.

I have heard strong support for NATO's operations and missions, strong support for what we are doing in Afghanistan and our further ambitions, strong support for the training mission in Iraq, where we have further ambitions in setting up the training academy and where we have now fully manned and financed what we committed to do. And you know it's the Iraqi Government's first priority, training the Iraqi security forces so that their dependence on others can be less than it is at the moment. I heard strong support for our continued presence in Kosovo and stability in the Balkans.

I've heard a discussion on the importance of a strong NATO-EU partnership. At length, government leaders, heads of state discussed the political role of NATO, the stronger political role of NATO, and there was a lot of support for what I have been saying over the past 8, 9 months: that this political role is important, that NATO is a political-military alliance and that we should not shy away from discussing political subjects of relevance.

Many remarks and interventions were made on the Middle East, the importance of NATO's Mediterranean dialog, which is being strengthened, the importance of the